

**Statement of
George Skibine
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Economic Development
for Indian Affairs
United States Department of the Interior
At the Hearing before the House Committee on Natural Resources on
H.R. 2040, “To authorize a process by which the Secretary of the Interior
shall process acquisitions of certain real property of the Samish Nation into
trust, and for other purposes.”**

June 3, 2009

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is George Skibine, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Economic Development for Indian Affairs. I am pleased to be here to present the Administration’s views on H.R. 2040, a bill to authorize a process by which the Secretary of the Interior shall process acquisitions of certain real property of the Samish Indian Tribe into trust, and for other purposes.

Currently, the Department manages approximately 56 million acres of land held in trust. Over 11 million acres belong to individual Indians and nearly 45 million acres are held in trust for Indian Tribes. On these lands, Interior manages over 100,000 leases for individual Indians and Tribes.

The Department opposes H. R. 2040, which would provide the Secretary of the Interior authority to treat any acquisition application by the Samish Indian Tribe within the area described in Section 1 (b) as an on-reservation application under 25 CFR 151. We do not see any justification to exempt these off-reservation parcels from the requirements of 25 CFR 151.11 (which applies to off-reservation lands). The major difference between the regulatory provision applying to on-reservation acquisitions (25 CFR 151.10) and the provision applying to off-reservation acquisitions (25 CFR 151.11) is the weight given to the concerns of off-reservation local communities. In our view, the concerns of non-Indian communities that may be affected by off-reservation trust acquisitions are an important criterion in the Secretary’s discretionary decision of whether to acquire off-reservation land into trust, and it should be preserved.

We did note in the bill that the Samish Tribe is also referred to as the “Samish Indian Nation”. For purposes of clarity and consistency, we suggest that if the bill were to move forward that it should be amended to refer to the Tribe as the “Samish Indian Tribe, Washington” as it is referred to in the current list of federally recognized Indian tribes. 73 Fed. Reg. 18,553 (Apr. 4, 2008).

This concludes my prepared statement, I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have.